

VETERANS AND HUMAN SERVICES LEVY

First Quarter 2009 Report

Introduction

In November 2005, the citizens of King County voted to approve a Veterans and Human Services (VHS) Levy to respond to the needs of the county's veterans and their families, and other individuals and families in need.

The King County Executive, the Metropolitan King County Council, the volunteer members of two citizen oversight boards, veterans' organizations, housing and human services providers, and human services staff and advocates from across the county have been involved in the implementation of the VHS Levy. King County Ordinance 15279 required the levy proceeds to be split equally into two funds, one for services for veterans, military personnel and their families, and one for services for other low income people in need of these services. These funds are called the Veterans Levy Fund and the Human Services Levy Fund.

The 2009 Adopted King County Budget (Ordinance 16312, Sections 69 and 70), approved by the council in November 2008, called for quarterly reports on the progress of levy implementation. Proviso One of Section 69 pertaining to the Veterans Levy Fund states:

"Of this appropriation, \$100,000 shall not be expended or encumbered until the executive submits four quarterly progress reports for the veterans and human services. The quarterly reports shall include at a minimum: the amount of funding expended to date, the amount of funding contracted to date, the number and status of request for proposals to date and any individual program statistics available, such as number of individuals served. The quarterly reports are due on March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1, 2009, for council review."

A similar proviso in Section 70 pertains to the Human Services Levy Fund, with identical requirements and timelines.

This First Quarter 2009 Report on the implementation of the VHS Levy is submitted to the council per the budget provisos. It includes a financial update of the VHS Levy funding expended to date and the status of contracting for levy services. As for service information, a new approach is being taken with the quarterly reports for this year. Unlike the previous year, each of the four quarterly reports for 2009 will provide an in-depth exploration of one of four levy strategy service areas. The focus for this report is on *Strategy 1: Enhancing Access to Services for Veterans and their Families*. This report provides information on clients served during first quarter 2009 by the King County Veterans Program (KCVP), offers background data on the status of King County veterans and their families, and features a success story from a VHS Levy-supported Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) program.

Background

King County Ordinance 15279, approved in September 2005, placed before the voters a measure to create the VHS Levy. The ballot measure authorized King County to levy an additional

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property tax of five cents per \$1,000 of assessed value for a period of six years. The ordinance stipulated that the levy proceeds would be split equally, with one-half dedicated to assist veterans, military personnel and their families, and the other half to help other individuals and families in need. The voters of King County overwhelmingly approved the levy in November 2005.

The county established two citizen oversight boards as called for in the ordinance, and also developed the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) required by the council to serve as the overarching policy and service plan for expending levy proceeds. The SIP was submitted to the council in September 2006 and approved the following month. The two boards, the Regional Human Services Levy Oversight Board (RHSLOB) and the Veterans Citizen Levy Oversight Board (VCLOB), were convened in February 2007. Throughout 2007 and 2008, the boards worked on their assigned responsibilities of reviewing a multitude of activity-specific implementation plans, serving on many Request for Proposal (RFP) review panels, and receiving updates on the implementation of levy activities. With only a few procurement plans and RFP processes remaining to be conducted in 2009, board activities have turned to oversight of levy activities and educating the public on the VHS Levy and its accomplishments.

Service Improvement Plan

The SIP, approved by the council through Ordinance 15632, created five overarching strategies to enhance programs and services to help veterans and their families and other low-income residents throughout the county. These overarching strategies include the following:

- Strategy One: Enhancing services and access for veterans (Veterans Levy Fund only)
- Strategy Two: Ending homelessness through outreach, prevention, permanent supportive housing and employment
- Strategy Three: Increasing access to behavioral health services
- Strategy Four: Strengthening families at risk (Human Services Levy Fund only)
- Strategy Five: Increasing effectiveness of resource management and evaluation.

Each strategy includes several activities. Thirty-one activities in all, each included in one of the above strategies, are specified in the SIP. Program designs or procurement plans describing each activity in detail have now been prepared by staff, made available for public review and comment, and closely reviewed by the citizen oversight boards. These plans can be viewed on the levy Web site at: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/DCHS/Services/Levy.aspx>.

Financial Status Report (as of March 31, 2009)

King County Ordinance 15632 created two separate funds for VHS Levy proceeds: a Veterans Levy Fund and a Human Services Levy Fund. Proceeds from the levy are split equally into these

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two funds. The majority of the 31 individual SIP activities are progressing from the required board and public review, through the RFP process, and ultimately, to contracting and expenditure of the funds. Each of these activities is funded by either the Veterans Levy Fund or the Human Services Levy Fund, or in many cases, both.

As noted earlier, the RHSLOB and the VCLOB have been hard at work finishing up the review of the procurement plans and program designs for each levy activity, and carefully incorporating feedback from the public (a required step before making the funds available). The boards had reviewed activity plans representing \$50.8 million (97.5 percent) of all available funds by the end of first quarter 2009. A total of twenty Request for Proposal processes have been conducted to date to disburse Levy funds. None were conducted during first quarter 2009.

Under this adopted process, once the plans have been through board and public review, the funds are made available in the community. As of the end of first quarter 2009, a total of \$22.8 million (89.8 percent) of available Veterans Levy Fund dollars had been committed to agencies providing services in the community, either by letter of award, contract and/or memorandum of agreement, or allocated to expanding the range and capacity of the KCVP. Of the \$28.8 million, \$10.5 million (41.4 percent) has been expended (please note that expenditures will always lag services because King County pays on a reimbursement basis, after services have been provided in the community).

Of all available Human Services Levy Fund dollars, \$23.9 million (89.6 percent) has been similarly committed to agencies providing services in the community, either by letter of award, contract and/or memorandum of agreement, or allocated to expanding the capacity of specified internal programs, such as the Nurse Family Partnership operated by Public Health - Seattle and King County. There were no new RFP's for Human Services Levy Fund dollars in the first quarter. Of the \$23.9 million, \$9.2 million (34.4 percent) has been expended (again, please note that expenditures will always lag services because King County pays on a reimbursement basis, after services have been provided in the community).

Strategy One: Enhancing Services to Veterans, Military Personnel and their Families

Activities have been underway since the fourth quarter of 2006 to expand the geographic range and increase the capacity of the KCVP. Services continue to be provided at the Seattle and Renton office sites, and the KCVP provides staffing one day a week at the Auburn Veterans Facility. In addition, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) also provides services in Auburn one day a week, bringing two days per week of service to Auburn. During the first quarter of 2009, outreach services were provided in a number of areas including Enumclaw, Maple Valley, North Bend, Shoreline, and North Shore. Planning is underway to further expand outreach activities to veterans and their families.

According to first quarter 2009 service data, the KCVP had about 2,372 client visits, up slightly from last quarter. A total of 1,023 unduplicated clients received services from KCVP last quarter, almost 61 percent (624) receiving financial services to assist with such things as rent, utilities, and mortgage. Over 67 percent of financial services were related to housing assistance and about five percent related to food assistance.

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The KCVP continues to work with the WDVA – it's most significant partner. The WDVA has staff co-located at the KCVP downtown office and accepts referrals from KCVP to provide a variety of services to address the needs of veterans, including the following supported by the Veterans Levy Fund:

1. Homeless Veterans Reintegration Project for clients who are employable or employed, and in need of food, clothing and/or shelter.
2. Veterans Incarcerated Program for clients currently in jail or recently released from King County jails, offering services to help veterans succeed in the community post release.
3. Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC) for clients interested in volunteer or green collar career programs at local community colleges. Once a week, a representative of the VCC is at KCVP to accept referrals.
4. Treatment services for veterans with PTSD, trauma counseling for spouses, and trauma counseling for children who have grown up with a parent suffering from PTSD. This report includes the story of one such veteran receiving PTSD counseling through this program.

The KCVP also continues to work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center that offers a variety of services to veteran clients including medical, addiction treatment, mental health and housing services. Obtaining these services is made easier by regularly scheduled visits from VA Medical Center staff to KCVP.

The Veterans Levy Fund provides funding for transitional and shelter beds to assist KCVP clients. The William Booth Center provides 55 shelter beds and the Compass Center Men's Program provides eight transitional beds. The Compass Center's Shoreline Veterans Center and the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program houses in Burien and Columbia City serve as transitional living resources for KCVP clients. Solid Ground's Housing Stability Project provides short term rental support for those at risk of homelessness, and also manages the Community Voice Mail for homeless clients in need of a contact phone number for housing, employment or health care needs. The KCVP also collaborates in case planning with the Plymouth Housing Group's Simons Senior Apartments for the veteran clients housed in that facility.

Overview of Veterans and their Families in King County

In 2008, King County was home to more than 141,000 men and women who are current and former active members of the U.S. military, reserves and the National Guard. Most of these served as active military in the major conflicts of the last 60 years. The lasting impacts of military service on these veterans in King County are as varied as the wars they fought in.

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The war experience for over 75,000 veterans occurred between 35 to 65 years ago. These aging veterans either volunteered or were drafted in large numbers, which means they share a common generational experience.

This is much less true for the younger generation of veterans. Since 1990, and especially since 2000, global deployments have created a new population of veterans of the all-volunteer army. Many of these soldiers are severely affected by changing war conditions, multiple tours, stop-loss (being held longer than the normal enlistment), and being recalled for war zone duty even though already discharged from active duty.

There is an increasing awareness of the impacts of military services on the families that care for, or are dependent upon, the soldiers who have served. As a result, concern for the impact upon families becomes an even more critical consideration in maintaining a stable National Guard, which has a role within the state when not deployed to war zones.

Community-based human services for these veteran populations not only honor those who have served their country, but are critical in helping them re-integrate successfully into the civilian community upon discharge from the military. Once detached from the military, veterans and their family members are often on their own to live with the long-term impacts of their service experience. Veteran Affairs Medical Center health care is available, but King County has augmented this care by providing social services to King County veterans both directly and through sub-contracts with WDVA. These community-based services provide a range of financial and support services to vulnerable and/or homeless veterans lacking resources.

In preparing this quarterly report, a number of sources were used to gather data on veterans and their families, including the 2000 U.S. Census, 2006 and 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year estimates, literature reviews, and special datasets from the VA, VA Medical Center and King County Community Information Line. The following highlights were culled from the available data found on veterans and their families:

- There are an estimated 141,000 veterans in King County, with almost 50 percent living in South King County and over 25 percent in Seattle.
- A significant majority of King County veterans served during the Vietnam War or earlier. A third (35 percent) of all veterans are from the Vietnam War era and a fifth (20 percent) are from the Second World War and Korean war eras.
- Over 4,500 King County residents are currently on active duty status or have been within the last 12 months, according to 2007 ACS data estimates. A total of 9,800 individuals are Gulf War and/or Afghanistan War era veterans.
- With each generation, the proportion of adult men who serve in the military has declined significantly. Younger generation veterans are more likely to experience greater isolation from other veterans.

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- The majority of veterans in King County are married. Family members are impacted by the effects of their service, including the 3,000 children of active military.
- Those who are disabled due to war live primarily in South King County and those who are low-income and disabled live either in Seattle or South King County.
- Homeless veterans are disproportionately younger and are persons of color.
- It is estimated that King County has over 9,700 women veterans – nearly seven percent of all veterans.
- There are significant numbers of veterans of all eras likely to have PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or other mental health problems.
- Women veterans have a greater likelihood of experiencing PTSD when sexual trauma is coupled with service in war zones.
- Over 19,000 individuals in King County with the National Guard or reserves have not yet been called to active duty.

The implications of this data will be further developed in an evaluation report that will be completed during the second quarter of 2009. The evaluation report will be available on the veteran's levy Web page when it is completed.

An important measure of the success of levy-funded services comes from the experience of the clients of these services themselves. Stories of individual client successes are coming to light. One such story is below.

Client Story: A veteran who served as an infantryman in Afghanistan and Iraq

The following story about a veteran receiving PTSD counseling services, funded by Veterans Levy Fund dollars, at the WDVA provides a glimpse into PTSD's devastating impacts.

Joe was a 26 year old Army veteran when he came to the PTSD Program, having served two combat tours – one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. Promoted to sergeant, he was a unit squad leader within a rifle company in Iraq, responsible for daily combat patrols where he led his team on house-to-house searches for suspected insurgents and bomb making groups – a dangerous and stressful duty. On repeated occasions, he was directly involved in exchanges of fire that resulted in the deaths of his fellow soldiers, insurgents, and innocent civilians including women and children. He was wounded when a bullet passed through his arm, and knocked unconscious twice when road side bombs hit his vehicle, on one occasion rolling and killing two of his men. He vividly remembers every detail as if it happened an hour ago.

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Joe was an exemplary soldier in every way. Although his enlistment was for three years, his discharge was delayed due to a stop-loss extension in Iraq. He came home after three years and eight months of duty. Joe started school at the University of Washington where he was a B+ student, and got a job working nights. He was engaged to marry the girlfriend he had left behind when he was deployed, and they were looking to buy a modest house. He was doing pretty well, although from the beginning he had trouble sleeping, experienced nightmares, had problems concentrating, and often felt depressed or bored. Still, he did not think he needed to ask for help and thought he could handle it on his own.

A year and a half after discharge, Joe was called to report for duty. His inactive reserve status allowed the Army to call him back. Having thought he had completed his obligation, Joe was shocked and quickly fell into a downward spiral. His family worried for his safety, and finding the PTSD Program online, sent an e-mail asking for help. That same day, the program contacted Joe and got him into the office. The counseling session was intense. The threat of being sent back to Iraq had completely derailed Joe. He got an appointment with the VA Medical Center where he was seen by a PTSD psychologist. An assessment determined that Joe was, in fact, suffering from significant PTSD, depression, anxiety, and mild TBI. He was in no condition to return to active duty.

Joe and his PTSD case workers went to work. An exhaustive process is required to intervene in a re-deployment, but thanks to the non-stop efforts of PTSD Program coordinators and others, Joe was able to complete the necessary paperwork, verify his devastating diagnoses, and stop his orders for deployment.

One year later, Joe still has significant challenges. He had to drop out of school, due to an increase in symptoms and lack of concentration. The wedding is on hold. He remains in counseling. Fortunately, the PTSD program works with family members, and has helped Joe's family to understand his problems and learn how to help him in the future. While Joe's prognosis is promising, at only 28 years of age, Joe's life is forever altered by his war time experiences.

Because of the Veterans Levy Fund, King County has been able to dramatically increase the services that veterans and their families are able to receive. The PTSD counseling services that Joe received, for example, are now more readily available to veterans and their families in our community. By properly diagnosing Joe's difficulties, assisting him in documenting that he was no longer fit for deployment, and engaging him in counseling, another veteran was put on the road to recovery.

Thanks to the support of King County voters, the VHS Levy has made dramatic improvements in the lives of veterans, their families and others in need. Powerful stories like Joe's show how the levy is making a difference for residents in need across the county. A formal evaluation of levy-supported activities is currently underway and will add to these anecdotal reports, helping to further demonstrate the benefits of these services for Joe and thousands like him who have been fortunate to receive the services made possible by the VHS Levy.